

PROCEEDINGS OF THE HISTORIC CONSERVATION BOARD

MONDAY, APRIL 10, 2006

3:00 P.M., J. MARTIN GRIESEL ROOM, CENTENNIAL PLAZA II

The Historic Conservation Board met at 3:12 P.M., in the J. Martin Griesel Room, Centennial Plaza II, with members Senhauser, Kreider, Chatterjee, Sullebarger, Wallace and Raser present. Absent: Bloomfield, Spraul-Schmidt and Kirk.

MINUTES

The Historic Conservation Board unanimously approved the minutes of March 27, 2006 meeting, (motion by Sullebarger, second by Raser) with corrections.

CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS, 1730 RACE STREET, OVER-THE-RHINE HISTORIC DISTRICT

Staff member Adrienne Cowden presented a report on application to install a ten-panel mural on the north elevation of 1730 Race Street. Our Daily Bread operates a soup kitchen at 1730 Race Street. She distributed an additional packet of information with a slight change to the information the Board received in the staff report.

Ms. Cowden stated that it was determined that the one-story 1730 Race Street once formed the first floor of two separate structures – a two- and a three-story mixed-use building. Due to this and other alterations, the building does not contribute to the Over-the-Rhine Historic District.

Ms. Cowden summarized the mural design and installation process. She stated that the proposed mural meets the intent and spirit of the conservation guidelines. Ms. Cowden indicated that the mural will enliven the north elevation of 1730 Race Street and the Findlay Market area and will not be materially detrimental to the public health, safety, and welfare or injurious to the property in the district or vicinity where the property is located.

A pre-hearing meeting was held on Tuesday, April 4, 2006. Only Sister Mary Beth Peters, from Our Daily Bread, was in attendance. Ms. Cowden confirmed upon inquiry of Mr. Raser that the public had been notified and no one had contacted staff about the application.

In response to Mr. Kreider, Ms. Cowden stated that the cast iron frame would be retained and only painted.

BOARD ACTION

The Board voted unanimously (motion by Sullebarger, second Raser) to approve a Certificate of Appropriateness with the following conditions:

1. The mural and associated plaques shall be painted and installed as shown in drawings presented to the Board;
2. The mural is a piece of artwork not a sign. It shall not be utilized to advertise a business at this or any other location or be modified to include any type of signage. The only approved text is that proposed for the plaques associated with each panel and describing the overall project; and
3. The mural shall be maintained and retouched as necessary to keep it free from graffiti and in good condition.

CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS, 3925 SPRING GROVE AVENUE, NORTHSIDE NBD HISTORIC DISTRICT

Mr. Forwood summarized the staff report on this request for a Certificate of Appropriateness for the rehabilitation and construction of an addition at 3925 Spring Grove Avenue. The 2½-story structure is situated at the southwest corner of Spring Grove Avenue and Cooper Streets and is a contributing building within the Northside NBD Historic District. The property is located in a CC-M (Commercial Community-Mixed) Zoning District. The owner, Michael Thompson, plans to use the property for commercial on the first floor and four residential units above.

Mr. Forwood explained that contemporary materials would be used for the repairs. New vinyl windows will be installed to fit in the existing openings. Additions to the west and south elevations include a one-story garage, stairways and decks on the second and third floors. Mr. Forwood reminded the Board that the Northside NBD Historic District guidelines are not specific about replacement materials; metal and vinyl are not prohibited.

Generally staff prefers double garage doors, but one larger garage door is justified to accommodate a first floor business. Additionally, most of the garage addition, stairway and decks will not be visible from Cooper Street but will be visible from Spring Grove Avenue.

Mr. Forwood stated that staff recommended approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness for the proposal with the condition that final plans be reviewed and approved by the Urban Conservator prior to issuing a Certificate of Appropriateness and a building permit.

In response to Ms. Sullebarger, Mr. Forwood indicated that he had discussed the requirements for window replacements with Mr. Thompson.

In response to Mr. Chatterjee, Mr. Thompson stated that he had not seen drawings of the rear elevation and did not know why the decks were not of a consistent size. He said he would investigate and correct any inconsistencies.

Ms. Sullebarger thought that the garage, stairways and decks would be very visible from Spring Grove Avenue. She suggested that a wood railing would be more in keeping with the historic building. Mr. Thompson stated that his architect choose the wire mesh design to match the interior railings and indicated he was willing to use wood railings if required.

Ms. Wallace questioned using different materials for the interior and exterior railings. She asked for clarification regarding the building's location in the historic district. Mr. Thompson stated that his building is at the southern edge of the district and that the decks would only be visible from properties located outside the district.

Ms. Sullebarger made a motion to revise the staff recommendation to require a wood railing. The motion failed for lack of a second.

BOARD ACTION

The Board voted unanimously (motion by Kreider, second by Raser) to approve a Certificate of Appropriateness with the condition that final plans be reviewed and approved by the Urban Conservator prior to issuing a Certificate of Appropriateness and a building permit.

PRELIMINARY DESIGN REVIEW 355 WEST FOURTH STREET, WEST FOURTH STREET HISTORIC DISTRICT

Mr. Forwood stated that Middle Earth Properties (Middle Earth) is proposing to build a six-story, 49-unit condominium development at the corner of West Fourth Street, Central Avenue and McFarland Street in the West Fourth Street Historic District. The condominiums would be built on top of a three-story parking structure. One level or 26 spaces must remain open to the public for transient parking as a condition of the sale of public property to Middle Earth. The remaining two

parking levels will be below grade and reserved exclusively for residents. There will be a separate entrance for the condominium parking off of McFarland Street and another entrance off West Fourth Street for the public parking. The project has no retail or commercial component. Mr. Forwood indicated that the design of the main façade attempts to respond to the historic buildings along Fourth Street. However, the remainder of the design was loosely based on Miller/Hull Partnership's 1310 East Union in Seattle (a modern glass and steel frame loft style apartment building), and the side and rear elevations feature inset decks, non-structural metal cross braces and large expanses of glass.

Mr. Forwood stated the Urban Design Review Board (UDRB) looked at the proposal on April 7, 2006. It is subject to their review due to a development agreement with the City. Mr. Forwood mentioned that the Board should focus its discussion on the compatibility of this building within the historic district and its conformance to specific guidelines.

On the request of Mr. Senhauser, Michael Moore, City Architect and Secretary to the UDRB, summarized the UDRB's comments on the proposal. The UDRB had some concerns about the rhythm and consistency of the building design, particularly the west elevation. The general feeling was that designs for the south and east elevations were the most successful.

Tim Voss, Middle Earth, and Karol Laskowski, project architect, were present to answer questions from the Board. Mr. Voss presented Middle Earth's proposal to the Board, outlining the project concept and its development. He stated that Middle Earth planned to design a building that was new and exciting but did not look out of place.

Ms. Sullebarger noted that there were no storefronts, the public parking entrance was located on Fourth Street and the awning was metal instead of fabric. She asked that the developers respond to these points.

Mr. Laskowski responded that with exception of the awning, he was obligated by the development agreement with the City to provide an entrance off Fourth Street to the public parking. He was aware that this conflicted with the historic guidelines and tried to minimize the visual impact. In regards to the storefronts, there would be lighted displays in the windows.

In answer to Mr. Raser, Mr. Laskowski said that there would not be a garage door on the Fourth Street entrance.

In response to Ms. Sullebarger, Mr. Forwood stated that staff member Caroline Kellam prepared this report and he did not think she had any calls from the Cincinnati Preservation Association (CPA). Additionally, Mr. Voss stated that Middle Earth presented the project to the Cincinnati Preservation Association and interested neighbors. He said they did not receive any negative feedback.

Ms. Sullebarger said that she found the mixture of traditional and modern design interesting. She noted that the property had been vacant for quite some time and thanked Middle Earth for undertaking this project.

Mr. Raser suggested that there could be a way to tie the front and side facades together. He said he liked the proportion and rhythm of the front of the building but felt that a vertical rhythm could be added. He stated that the cornice needed to be revised to create either more or less of an emphasis. He also suggested that the Fourth Street pedestrian entrance be given greater emphasis.

Ms. Sullebarger stated that the street trees shown on Central Avenue in the drawings were important since they visually broke up the building's heavy base. She inquired if the developer or the City would be responsible for the plantings. Mr. Moore confirmed that the City would be installing the trees as part of a larger project.

Mr. Senhauser commented that the proposed building appeared proportionate on the upper stories but not the first story. The first story seemed disproportionately undersized compared to that of neighboring historic structures. He suggested narrowing the horizontal band between the first and second stories, installing taller windows, or selecting different materials to lengthen the appearance of first level. He also suggested that the unique identifiable characteristics of Fourth Street's historic buildings could provide design ideas.

Mr. Senhauser concurred with Mr. Raser that the cornice needed some additional thought.

BOARD ACTION

Because this was a preliminary design review, no action was required by the Board.

PRELIMINARY DESIGN REVIEW 518, 520, AND 526 READING ROAD, OVER-THE-RHINE HISTORIC DISTRICT

Adrienne Cowden identified the three parcels involved in this residential conversion. An early commercial five-story building is located at 518 Reading Road, and a larger five-story reinforced concrete commercial building occupies the adjacent 520 Reading Road. The project will connect the two buildings to create 12 condominiums with interior parking on the first floor level. A vacant parcel at 526 Reading Road will be used to provide automobile access from Reading Road into the first floor. A new stair and elevator tower will be constructed at the rear of this parcel.

The three properties are located at the southern edge of the Over-the-Rhine Local and National Register Historic Districts in a CC-P (Commercial Community – Pedestrian) Zoning District. The buildings at 518 and 520 Reading Road are considered to be contributing resources.

Ms. Cowden outlined several issues that staff felt required the Board's consideration including the status of 520 Reading Road, proposed changes to the exterior walls (including a new glass façade), and the construction of a stair and elevator tower.

In response to questions from the Board and Mr. Daspit, Ms. Cowden reiterated that although it was probable that the upper and lower portions of 520 Reading Road were constructed at different times they were compatible with each other. In addition, staff considered the entire building to be contributing based on an update of the 1978 Cincinnati Historic Inventory completed in 2004 and accepted by the Ohio Historic Preservation Office.

Joe Bley, the prospective owner, and architects John Grier and Terry Daspit were present to answer questions from the Board. Mr. Grier provided the Board with a packet of information and gave a detailed presentation on the proposed project. Mr. Grier indicated that his client felt the buildings must have a consistent façade to market successfully as a single project, and that large window openings were necessary to take advantage of views and to create viable residential spaces. Mr. Grier also asserted that the limestone facing on 520 Reading Road was in poor condition and could not be repaired.

Ms. Sullebarger agreed with staff that the two segments of 520 Reading Road related to each other and were attractive designs. She further commented that the buildings at 518 and 520 Reading Road – in style, material construction, rhythm, and other characteristics – reflected their different dates of construction. Ms. Sullebarger remarked that removing original fabric and installing a curtain wall to make the buildings look the same represented an approach that was fundamentally opposed to historic preservation. She felt that the windows did not need to be enlarged to make individual units viable and stated that this modification did not meet the conservation guidelines.

Mr. Raser commented that the condominium floor plans were not open enough to take full advantage of the natural light. He suggested the design team reconsider the placement of demising walls and interior partitions. Raised platforms could create defined spaces and be used to hide mechanicals.

Ms. Sullebarger and Mr. Raser both suggested the damaged limestone panels on 520 Reading Road could be replaced or repaired. Mr. Raser stated that he has seen limestone in much worse condition repaired, and it would be more cost effective then installing an entirely new facade. In response Mr. Grier stated that replacing the limestone was cost prohibitive and he questioned the feasibility of repairing the damaged panels. He also asserted that the two buildings were not attractive enough to be commercially successful without the glass cover. Mr. Daspit indicated that he read through the historic guidelines and acknowledged that the design did not meet their requirements. However, he had approached the proposal with his client's needs in mind.

Mr. Kreider commented that in his opinion, using modern materials to re-sheath a viable historic building was not acceptable. He said that it was not necessary to make the two buildings converse with each other. However, Mr. Kreider indicated he would not be opposed to enlarging the first and second story windows of 520 Reading Road to match those in the upper stories. He felt this modification would not negatively impact the composition of the building's façade.

Mr. Senhauser stated that although the buildings were not high style, they did contribute to the district. He suggested that the approach was fundamentally backward. He did not believe that stripping the skin off a viable building constituted preservation and that similar buildings in the historic district had been profitably restored. Mr. Senhauser suggested that the buildings could be good candidates for the Federal Historic Tax Credit if approached in a different manner. Mr. Forwood and Ms. Cowden indicated that since the project involved for sale condominiums it would not qualify for the Federal Historic Tax Credit and that the buildings were not located in the National Register Historic District boundary.

Mr. Chatterjee agreed with comments made by other Board members and stated that he would like to see the architect come up with alternative solutions.

BOARD ACTION

Because this was a preliminary design review, no action was required by the Board.

ADJOURN

As there were no other items for consideration by the Board, the meeting adjourned.

William L. Forwood
Urban Conservator

John C. Senhauser
Chairman

Date: _____